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Barack H. Obama
44th President of the United States:
Has "The Dream" Been Fulfilled?
Between the Lines
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The day of an African American President of the United States is no longer coming. That day is here. Witnessing Barack Obama take the oath of office, in the freezing cold with a million other people, is surely one of the seven highlights of my life (along with witnessing the birth of my four children, my second marriage and being present at the Million Man March in 1995). The chests and breasts of black people were bursting out with all "Americans" who shared in this celebration. I was close enough to witness the look on his face but far enough away to feel stymied in the pomp and circumstance of a transition of power progress foreign to everyday people, particularly every black people.

To be honest, this was the first Inauguration Day most first time attendees, black-white-brown-red-yellow, ever wanted to attend. Foreign to this process are people that have been rarely included. Washington's "power elite," namely the corporate America and its lobbyists, had to find another way to play - at least for one day, as the American people reclaimed its country back and common man (woman) played centered stage. On January 20th, race took a backstage in a way that it rarely does. But for the fact that Barack is black, a fact that in all its history-making glory was impossible to ignore, people of all ideologies came together to celebrate this day.

I even took pictures with some "Rednecks For Obama," something I would have sworn,

just a year ago, I never would have done. But if rednecks can put aside race and suppress a twisted ideology for the common good of the nation, so can I. That was the power of Barack Hussein Obama taking the oath of office. It was a great day for America, and an even greater day for the people whose legacy is tied to those who once labored in this nation as slaves. They certainly celebrated this day, as they gave more than any of us ever could suggest, their blood, sweat, tears, their lives and their deaths - and their freedom.

Leading up to Inauguration Day, the frequent commentary sought to suggest that Martin Luther King, Jr's "dream," the nightmare of black America that King so many times articulated in his speeches and highlighted in the speech white America has chosen to romanticize in the aftermath of King's life, has been fulfilled. Barack Obama's election and swearing-in, which seemed to take forever in the past three and a half months, is being framed as some kind of "payoff" on America's vicious past. That somehow, the election of a black President makes up for the centuries, decades and generations of racial oppression and economic subjugation that America tolerated (and on some levels, still tolerates) is misguided.

Just for the record, America can elect ten black Presidents and never make up for slavery and segregation. But the very thought that America, and commentators in America, think that we're "even" now, and that America has somehow gotten past race and racial differences, is incredulous. The election of Barack Obama simply means America has progressed to the extent that, in its worse realities, it was not prepared to allow race to hold the nation back, as it once would have. It doesn't mean America has progressed to the extent where it would look past race to allow the nation to move ahead.

There is a difference, and here it is: we all know that Obama was the superior candidate throughout the campaign season - but not one person would have bet his or her home or life savings that Obama would, for sure, be elected the next President of the United States. The Republicans ran inferior candidates and presented the inferior arguments, and even in the face of a discredited party and a failing economy, John McCain was in the race until the last week before the election. Even then, the nation feared a "Bradley effect" that most whites wouldn't vote for a black candidate - even when it became obvious that the country really experienced a reverse Bradley effect whereby many whites wanted to (and did) vote for the best candidate but couldn't publicly state they had for fear of being viewed as traitors to white privilege and white interests.

Race is most subtle in American culture, but it is still present. Yes, an aspect of Dr. King's "dream" was fulfilled when America elected Obama, based on the content of his character, and not on the color of his skin. But America still has massive racial disparities in income, wealth, health and education. America still prosecutes and jails more African Americans, discriminates more in housing and credit, charges them higher interest on loans, hires them last, fires them first, still wages hates crimes against them in disproportionate measure and mocks them disproportionately as less responsible, less moral, less civil and less "patriotic."

Black America has a long way to go to be considered full partners in this "American Dream." What we do know is that it took a huge leap of faith in electing Barack Obama,

and kept its promise in this week's swearing-in ceremony. Now, black America is taking a huge leap of faith that the check marked "insufficient funds" in the "dream" Dr. King spoke to 45 years ago will be paid - not on the backs of future generations - but by the dreams and aspirations of future generations of black youngsters who never knew the real possibilities of their full potentials, much less this possibility, because of race reality in America. Has that really changed?

That is a question that is yet to be determined. In the meantime, we know one thing for sure: no, the dream hasn't been completely fulfilled. But America made a helleva down payment in electing Barack Obama. Maybe, just maybe, change has indeed come to America.

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